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### Trip to Israel shows the read meaning of patriotism

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## **NEWS RELEASE**

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Oct. 7, 1999

**Contact:** Jessica Kobos, ASUM president, (406) 243-2038.

### **TRIP TO ISRAEL SHOWS THE REAL MEANING OF PATRIOTISM**

**MISSOULA--**

**By Jessica Kobos, president  
Associated Students of The University of Montana**

This summer I had the opportunity to travel to Israel with 14 other student body presidents from around the country. The goal of the trip was to familiarize the group with the social and political conditions in Israel. It was sponsored by the American Jewish Committee, based in New York.

Of course, as I left the United States I was under the impression that I was to understand the conditions of Israel's Jewish population, not the other side -- the Palestinians. After all, the trip was underwritten by a Jewish organization. However, I truly did see both sides and came to appreciate both beliefs as well. What I learned in that three-week adventure I will never be able to forget or fully share with anyone.

In a class I'm now taking, we are reading "A History of the Holocaust" by Rita Steinhardt Botwinick. In the book, Steinhardt Botwinick says, "The bond of hatred is as strong as the bond of love." This quote best describes what I learned in Israel.

We traveled everywhere and saw all the sites of Jerusalem and the surrounding countryside. I walked where Jesus Christ and his apostles may have walked. I saw the rock that

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Mohammed leaped to heaven from. I swam in the Dead Sea and lay in mud pools and hiked Mount Masada in the Israeli desert. In between all the fabulous sightseeing we did, we also met with some of the most incredible leaders from both sides of politics in Israel.

In all of our conversations with political leaders, the same message became clear: Both sides thought they were completely right. They had been fighting for so long that hope of a true and lasting reconciliation seemed imaginary. Both sides were used to the hate they had lived with for centuries, and were not prepared to forget about it anytime soon.

I saw this most in the Israelis my age. In Israel all citizens -- men and women -- serve time in the military from age 18 to around 23. The concerns I have as a college student in Montana are completely different from what Israelis' concerns are. They wonder if the land they grew up on will be given away in a land-for-peace deal. They wonder if they will be home for the next Sabbath. They wonder if they will have to fire their guns at another teenager to protect their homeland. This makes me wonder if peace is ever possible. The children of Israel know the history, and learn from an early age who the enemy is.

While my visit to Israel was a reflective and spiritual visit for me personally, it also was incredibly troubling. Israel is a land with so much history rooted in religion, yet it is constantly at war. I see the newspaper articles that discuss peace agreements and land-for-peace deals. I watch the news and wonder if the commentators on Nightline have ever asked a 19-year-old Israeli if he or she is ready to die for every inch of Israel. The answer invariably is yes. They would die for their country, for their faith and for their family.

My visit forced me to ask myself: Would I die for my country? Would my generation fight to the end for every square inch of the United States? I fear the answer invariably is no.



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Most 20-somethings won't vote, let alone pick up arms to protect the United States. So what does Israel have that brings out such devotion in its population?

I must return to Steinhardt Botwinick's quote -- the thought that love and hate are so interchangeable. It seems to be the only explanation. Israel, while a land of intense religious history, also is a land of intense hatred and violence. Although this paradox has taught me the meaning of devotion to a belief, it leaves me fearful that long-term peace isn't feasible. I want to love my country like the Israelis. I want to be as devoted to the land as they are. I want to have the same feeling of being home for the first time in my life that seems to be on the face of every Jewish person in Israel.

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JK/ps  
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